

‘HOW MUCH OF THE FRENCH IS IN THIS’: APHRA BEHN’S USE OF HUMOUR IN *SIR PATIENT FANCY* (1678)

Ángeles Tomé Rosales, Universidade de Vigo¹
Email: angelestome@uvigo.es

Abstract: In *Sir Patient Fancy*, Behn asserts that her comedy is based only on Molière’s *Le Malade imaginaire* (1675): “Others [...] cried it was made out of at least four *French Plays*, when I had but a very bare hint from one, the *Malad Imagenere*” (5). This statement constitutes a reaction to the claim that, apart from *Le Malade imaginaire*, *Les Femmes savantes* (1672), *L’Amour médecin* (1665) and *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (1669) are also sources of *Sir Patient Fancy*. In this paper, after analysing the mechanisms of humour production used by these two playwrights, I hope to shed some light on the relationship between Molière’s comedies and *Sir Patient Fancy*.

Keywords: Drama, Seventeenth Century Literature, English Literature, Humour, Comedy, Literary Criticism.

Título en español: ‘[H]ow much of the French is in this’: el uso del humor por parte de Aphra Behn en *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678)

Resumen: En *Sir Patient Fancy*, Behn afirma que su comedia se basa solamente en *Le Malade imaginaire* (1675): “Others [...] cried it was made out of at least four *French Plays*, when I had but a very bare hint from one, the *Malad Imagenere*” (5). Esta afirmación constituye una reacción a la afirmación de que, junto a *Le Malade imaginaire*, *Les Femmes savantes* (1672), *L’Amour médecin* (1665) y *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (1669) también son fuentes de *Sir Patient Fancy*. En este artículo, tras analizar los mecanismos de producción del humor usados por estos dos dramaturgos, espero aclarar la relación entre las comedias de Molière y *Sir Patient Fancy*.

Palabras clave: Teatro, Literatura del Siglo XVII, Literatura Inglesa, Humor, Comedia, Crítica Literaria.

INTRODUCTION

As Barreca (1992: 2; 1994: 12) has pointed out “[c]omedy, out of all the textual territories explored, is the least universal”. This genre can be considered at least as complex as its essence, humour. Human beings do not laugh at the same things: both the production and the reception of humour largely depend on subjectivity. Among the factors which have an influence on the interpretation of humour, it is possible to mention culture, gender, race or social class, among others (cf. Short 1992: 63). However, this fact has been ignored for a long time and, as a consequence, the study of humour has been reduced to the perusal

¹ **Date of reception:** 27 June 2013

Date of Acceptance: 3 September 2013

of those instances of humour produced by white men enjoying central social positions.² Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that women, who usually occupy peripheral positions in society, lack a sense of humour. In fact, from the late 1980s onwards, scholars such as Barreca, Finney or Walker have extensively dealt with so-called women's humour, which had been neglected because "[it] is often anarchic and apocalyptic; the unsolicited laughter of women spells trouble to those in power" (Barreca 1988: 12; 1994: 22). This is related to one of the functions of humorous discourse which Attardo (2002: 54) takes into account: the social function called Group Identification/Bonding.³ According to Attardo, humour contributes to the definition of the different groups involved in the humorous situation: "[I]f A tells an aggressive joke about B who does not laugh and C, D, and E laugh, B can assume A, C, D, and E share the same aggressive intent or disparaging scripts displayed in the joke" (55).

This explains the creation of an in-group, which includes those who laugh together, and an out-group, which is made up by those who are rejected by the members of the in-group. According to Walker, women's humour "is usually expressed within the group, rather than in mixed company (1988: 106)", within an in-group formed by those who laugh together at the patriarchal institutions. As humour is empowering, patriarchal society has always tried to prevent women from making use of such a potentially transgressive tool, which might challenge the hierarchical structure upholding patriarchy.⁴ In so-called "traditional humour", women always form part of out-groups: they do not usually laugh at the instances of traditional humour because they do not identify themselves with the female stereotypes typical of that kind of humour: the dumb blonde, the gossipy spinster, the henpecking housewife, the inept housekeeper, the lovelorn woman, the nagging wife, the randy widow or the shrew, among others (cf. Crawford 1992: 35; Finney 1994: 2; Walker 1988: 11). According to Walker (1988: 11), female humorists subvert these stereotypes because women's humour allow female laughers to form in-groups when they deride patriarchal institutions. Those who try to preserve patriarchy avoid challenging the institutions which the system is based on and, as a consequence, they form out-groups. They have always tried to silence women's humour. According to Barreca (1988: 14), the main aims of women's humour may be considered dangerous: "In exploring laughter, women are exploring their own powers; they are refusing to accept social and cultural boundaries that mark the need or desire for closure as a "universal". Comedy is dangerous; humour is a weapon. Laughter is refusal and triumph."⁵ Women's humour might be considered different from traditional

² Cf. Barreca (1994: 11), who states that "studies of humor have traditionally studied male humor."

³ Cf. Bergson (2009: 576), who also describes laughter as a social gesture: "You would hardly appreciate the comic if you felt yourself isolated from others. Laughter appears to stand in need of an echo. Listen to it carefully; it is not an articulate, clear, well-defined sound; it is something which would fain be prolonged by reverberating from one to another, something beginning with a crash, to continue in successive rumblings, like thunder in a mountain. Still, this reverberation cannot go on for ever. It can travel within as wide a circle as you please: the circle remains, none the less, a closed one. Our laughter is always the laughter of a group."

⁴ In order to illustrate this statement, it is possible to quote Stephen (2009: 534), who contended that "a very large province of the humorous is absolutely interdicted to women. Many of the most amusing things that ever have been said in this world are, in one direction or another, such as would be totally incompatible with the feminine sense of delicacy".

⁵ Barreca (1996: 2) also states that "women's lives have always been filled with humor. Women's humor emerges as a tool for survival in the social and professional jungles, and as a weapon against the absurdities of

humour because it is directly influenced by the particular circumstances which women have undergone. As Barreca (1994: 12) indicates, “[m]uch of women’s comic play has to do with power and its systematic misappropriation. Women’s humor is about our reclamation of certain forms of control over our own lives. Humor allows us to gain perspective by ridiculing the implicit insanities of a patriarchal culture.” Through humour, women try to gain control of their own destinies. However, in order to achieve their goal, they have to prove that patriarchal institutions are cultural and, therefore, mutable.

Although most of these scholars who have been quoted so far base their research on contemporary comedy, it is also possible to provide evidence that women have been making use of humour that way for a long time. In fact, Aphra Behn, who is considered to be the first professional female playwright, wrote eighteen comedies at the end of the seventeenth century.⁶ These comedies evidence what the theories developed by twentieth-century scholars such as Barreca, Finney or Walker among others, remark. Particularly, it is interesting to quote one of Barreca’s most challenging statements about women’s comedy, that it is often “about de-centering, dislocating and de-stabilising the world” (Barreca 1988: 15; 1994: 30). In order to back this statement, this article attempts to compare comedies written by a man with a comedy written by a woman in the seventeenth century. As we have already pointed out, among the sources which Behn resorted to in order to write *Sir Patient Fancy*, there seem to be four comedies by Molière. Therefore, focusing on the comic situations in Behn’s play, we attempt to identify these sources and compare them with the former in order to find out the differences between the comic situations, which will be analysed in order to verify if there are such important dissimilarities between traditional male-authored comedies and Behn’s comedy and if the humorous situations in the plays written by this female playwright really tend to challenge patriarchal principles. However, before starting the analysis, it is necessary to explain the examination of the literary paratext which we have carried out because, thanks to it, it is possible to find out the discrepancies between the author and the critics about the sources of *Sir Patient Fancy*.

In a letter to the reader preceding this comedy, Behn argues that her gender identity is the only reason why her play has been brought into contempt.⁷ After comparing it with other plays of the period, she claims that hers was not particularly bawdy, as her critics believe. But, this was not the only fault attributed to her work. Contemporary critics such as Langbaine stated that *Le Malade imaginaire* was not the only play Behn had resorted to in order to write her comedy. In both *Momus Triumphans: or, the Plagiaries of the English Stage* (1688) and *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (1691), Langbaine states that she also resorted to Richard Brome’s *The Damoiselle* (1653). However, Langbaine (1691: 18) vindicates Behn’s work in the following way: “[W]hatever she borrows she improves for the better: a Plea which our late Laureat has not been asham’d to make use of”. This statement was reproduced by Giles Jacob in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless,

injustice” and Walker (1988: 149) stresses that “this humor challenges the assumptions that underlie that culture and reveals their fundamental absurdity”.

⁶ And she also made extensive use of humour in her prose fiction, as Figueroa Dorrego (2001 and 2005) has demonstrated.

⁷ Cf. Finke (1993: 25), who states that “[t]hroughout her career Behn inveighed against the unfairness of a public that condemned her plays as obscene and promiscuous simply because they were written by a woman.”

in the nineteenth century, Halliwell (1860: 230) observed that, apart from *Le Malade imaginaire*, Molière’s *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* is also among the sources of *Sir Patient Fancy*. Recently, Todd (1996a: 226-227 and 1996b: 3-4) and Hughes (2001: 96-97) have added *Les Femmes savantes* and *L’Amour médecin* to the sources of Behn’s comedies. Therefore, *Le Malade imaginaire*, *Les Femmes savantes*, *L’Amour médecin* and *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* may be the four French plays which critics referred to when the play was released. So, in the following sections I aim to provide an analysis of what she borrowed from the above-mentioned plays and how she adapted it in order to produce instances of women’s humour.

1. “RAIL ON, WHILST I DISPOSE MY SELF TO LAUGH AT THEE”: USING HUMOUR TO SHAKE THINGS UP

Clearly, Behn’s Lady Fancy, Sir Patient’s wife, is based on Molière’s Béline, Argan’s wife in *Le Malade imaginaire*. However, there are at least three main differences between these two characters. First of all, Lady Fancy can always count on her maid’s admiration and help. Maundy is even willing to assist Lady Fancy to conceal her lover from her husband. These women not only get on well but they also have a good opinion of each other. As it is possible to find evidence that the relationship between Molière’s Béline and Toinette, her servant, may be classified as gruesome, this is one of Behn’s original contributions to the story. In fact, Toinette makes reference to Béline as “[I]a bonne bête”⁸ (Molière 1971: 1105). Obviously, this is an ironic phrase which, when applied to a person, makes reference to her/his aggressiveness. Therefore, it enables us to infer that Toinette neither likes Béline’s procedures nor intends to help her. The importance of this first mismatch between both comedies lies in the different characterization of female characters in comedies written by female and male dramatists. Female dramatists usually establish a bond among them, whereas male dramatists often portray women as arrogant, mercenary and selfish beings.

Another example of the different relationship established between Lady Fancy/Béline and Isabella/Angélique is the reaction of Isabella/Angélique when she finds out that Lady Fancy/Béline is somewhat interested in the man the former loves. After the discovering scene which reveals that Lady Fancy and Lodwick, Isabella’s lover, had spent a night together, Isabella blames her lover: “Oh Traytor! wou’d thou hadst been that Ravisher I took thee for, rather than such a Villain – false! and with my Mother too!” (Behn 1996b: 39). By contrast, in Molière’s comedy, Angélique accuses Béline of being a mercenary woman who, after marrying Argan to achieve a certain amount of freedom, longs to become a widow in order to inherit her husband’s properties:

Il y en a d’aucunes qui prennent des maris seulement pour se tirer de la contrainte de leurs parents, et se mettre en état de faire tout ce qu’elles voudront. Il y en a d’autres, Madame, qui font du mariage un commerce de pur intérêt, que ne se marient que pour

⁸ *The good beast.*

gagner des douaires, que pour s'enrichir par la mort de ceux qu'elles épousent⁹ (Molière 1971: 1142).

Isabella's and Angélique's different reactions are probably based on the different notions Molière and Behn have of marriage in seventeenth-century society. On the one hand, Behn believes it should be a commitment between a man and a woman who love, and therefore trust, each other. On the other hand, Molière sees marriage as an institution which helps to perpetuate patriarchy. Both Isabella and Angélique get angry but Isabella blames Lodwick whereas Angélique condemns Béline by criticising those women who, like her stepmother, take advantage of marriage in order to get financial benefits. In Angélique's onslaught, it is also possible to perceive a vindication of the institution of marriage, which is supposedly undermined by women such as Béline. Both Isabella and Angélique are dealing with exactly the same institution but the dramatists' different points of view can be perceived through their female characters' words.

The relationship between the main character's daughter and wife is also relevant to the production of humour in the comedy. In both comedies, there is a particular scene which shows Lady Fancy's and Béline's different attitudes towards their husbands' daughter. In Behn's comedy, after showing her husband the love letter she had been writing to her lover, Lady Fancy tells him that it had been written by Isabella. However, Lady Fancy also tries to justify Isabella's attitude: "I believe she meant it to Mr. *Fain-love*, for whom else cou'd it be design'd? she being so soon to marry him" (Behn 1996b: 51). This contrivance allows her to avoid her husband's anger but she does not harm Isabella's reputation. As the following statement proves, Sir Patient believes all the lies his wife has told him and, as a consequence, he becomes the butt of the situation: "Ah, what a blessing I possess in so excellent a Wife! and in regard I am every day descending to my Grave, --- ah --- I will no longer hide from thee the provision I have made for thee, in case I die" (Behn 1996b: 51). Pleased at his wife's attitude, Sir Patient is willing to reveal to her the amount of money she is going to inherit once he passes away. This resolution constitutes the onset of a comic situation which exposes Sir Patient's weak position within the social network. By contrast, in *Le Malade imaginaire*, Béline does not show consideration for Angélique's feelings: she tells Argan that she had seen a young man with his daughter in order to make Argan conscious of the instability of his position. As Foyster has pointed out, "[f]athers were the guardians of their daughters' sexual reputations until marriage; their 'value' in the marriage market was dependent on their chastity (91)." If Angélique had sex before marriage, her own reputation would be damaged and this, in turn, would damage Argan's too.

At the end of Behn's comedy, Leander encourages Sir Patient to test his wife's fidelity by feigning to be dead. Behn provides Lady Fancy with intelligence and, therefore, she starts to weep and maintains that she will not be able to live without him once she is told that her husband is dying. At the beginning, Sir Patient is convinced that his wife is completely faithful to him but, as soon as Lady Fancy thinks that her husband is dead, she reveals her true feelings: "Now my dear *Wittmore*, claim thy Rites of Love without controll, without

⁹ *There are some who marry simply to free themselves from the yoke of their parents, and to be at liberty to do all they like. There are others, Madam, who see in marriage only a matter of mere interest; who marry only to get a settlement, and to enrich themselves by the death of those they marry.*

the contradiction of wretched Poverty or Jealousy: Now, undisguis'd thou maist approach my Bed, and reign o're all my Pleasures and my Fortunes, of which this minute I create thee Lord" (Behn 1996b: 75). Lady Fancy's words show a common feature of patriarchal marriage: it is too often a mercenary institution. Lady Fancy does not love Sir Patient, she loves a penniless young man who is jealous of Sir Patient. Even so, they married each other because of Sir Patient's wealth: on the one hand, he needs to breed an heir who can inherit and preserve his property; on the other, she needs to supply her lover with money. Both of them achieve their goals through marriage but, allowing her lover to approach her bed, Lady Fancy compromises her sexual chastity and damages Sir Patient's honour by making him a cuckold. It is also possible to perceive Lady Fancy's empowerment once she owns Sir Patient's properties: she becomes a creator, a goddess who is able to make her lover a Lord. In this scene, there is an analogy between Lady Fancy and the figure of the mother, who creates life. Lady Fancy's role is legitimized by nature, whereas Sir Patient's position in society is due to an artificial system created by men in order to preserve a gender hierarchy who allows men to rule the world by subordinating women. Patriarchy has developed its own frailties: manhood rests on the control of female sexuality and, therefore, "men had given women the potential for power, as their words and actions could endanger manhood with the most devastating effect" (Foyster 1999: 55). This is reflected in Behn's comedy: Sir Patient gets angry when he finds out the actual aim of his wife and he is even willing to take revenge on her but he is not able to do that. In fact, Lady Fancy herself threatens to laugh at him: "Rail on, whilst I dispose my self to laugh at thee" (Behn 1996b: 76). Lady Fancy can laugh at her husband because she knows that, once she committed adultery, the community could mock Sir Patient for not coming up to the standards as a husband. It is possible to state that this ending is originally concocted by Behn because Molière's ending appears to be very different. In his comedy, Béline gets relieved when she finds out that her spouse is dead: "Me voilà délivré d'un grand fardeau. Que tu es sotté, Toinette, de t'affliger de cette mort"¹⁰ (Molière 1971: 1167). Taking into account her attitude towards her husband's death, Béline seems to be a gullible but selfish woman who does not care about Argan. In fact, she herself describes him as a burden. Nevertheless, apart from being simple-minded and self-centred, Béline lacks the intelligence Lady Fancy is granted and, therefore, she is unable to contrive a means of challenging her husband's resolution. In the end, Argan, as the guardian of his daughter's reputation, allows her to marry Cléante, the man she loves. Regarding these two endings, the main difference is the characterization of Sir Patient/Argan's wife: on the one hand, Lady Fancy is an intelligent woman who manages to deal with her husband's attempt to deprive her of authority; on the other, Béline lacks the resolution which makes Lady Fancy emerge victorious. Moreover, it is also important the way in which each author creates humour: both of them make use of derisive laughter, but in Behn's comedy the audience laugh at the discredited husband, whereas in Molière's comedy the wife becomes the butt. Finally, it is also relevant to highlight that the female dramatist creates an intelligent woman and, by contrast, Molière develops a character which fits the patriarchal standards.

¹⁰ *I am delivered from a most grievous burden. How silly of you, Toinette, to be so afflicted at his death.*

2. "SCANDALUM MAGNATUM, I'LL TELL THEE MORE": INTERWEAVING ELEMENTS OF A SUBVERSIVE DISCOURSE INTO THE LANGUAGE OF THE STATUS QUO

Molière's *Le Malade imaginaire* is not the only source of Behn's comedy. It is also possible to find similarities between *Les Femmes savantes* and *Sir Patient Fancy*. In the latter, Behn includes a character who lacks a counterpart in Molière's *Le Malade imaginaire*: Lady Knowell, an affected learned woman, mother to Lodwick and Lucretia. Like Cléante in *Le Malade imaginaire*, Lodwick finally marries the main character's daughter in *Sir Patient Fancy*. However, both Lodwick and Sir Patient are much more complex characters than Cléante and Argan. In *Sir Patient Fancy*, Lodwick is the nexus between two of the sources of Behn's comedy: he is the man who the main character's daughter loves but he is also Lady Knowell's son. Lady Knowell plays a very important role within Behn's comedy. She gathers characteristics of two characters from Molière's *Les Femmes savantes*: Bélise and Philaminte. Among the features Lady Knowell inherits from Bélise and Philaminte, it is possible to highlight her academic wisdom and her intention of arranging her daughter's marriage. Bélise is particularly interested in linguistic knowledge. In fact, she tells her sister-in-law Bélise off for offending grammar (*grammaire*). Martine, the servant, who does not know anything about this discipline, asks about the grandmother (*grand-mère*), a word which in French sounds like grammar: "Qui parle d'offenser grand-mère ni grand-père?"¹¹ (Molière 1971: 1009).¹² Bélise gets really angry when she hears that: "Grammaire est prise à contresens par toi, / Et je t'ai dit déjà d'où vient ce mot"¹³ (Molière 1971: 1009). Martine's question does not make either Bélise or Philaminte laugh, they are used to the uneducated servant's use of language. Nevertheless, the audience is expected to laugh at it because of the abrupt transfer of the train of thought from one context (grammar) to another (family members), which puts a sudden end to the audience's tense expectations and, consequently, the accumulated emotion is left hanging in the air and is discharged in laughter (cf. Koestler 1994: 682). Yet, Chrysale, who is Bélise's brother and Philaminte's husband, object to the interest in academic knowledge displayed by these women. For him, the functions of women in society must be restricted to the domestic environment:

Leurs ménages étaient tout leur docte entretien,
Et leurs livres un dé, du fil et des aiguilles,
Dont elles travaillaient au trousseau de leurs filles.
Les femmes d'à présent sont bien loin de ces moeurs:
Elles veulent écrire, et devenir auteurs¹⁴ (Molière 1971: 1012).

¹¹ *Who speaks of offending either grandmother or grandfather?*

¹² Cf. Bergson, who deals with the impossibility of translating the comic created by language from one language into another (2009: 79).

¹³ *The word grammar is misunderstood by you, and I have told you a hundred times where the word comes from.*

¹⁴ *Her family was the subject of all her learned conversation, / And for books she had needles, thread, and a thimble, / With which they worked at their daughters' trousseau. Women, in our days, are far from behaving thus: they must write and become authors.*

According to Chrysale, women should focus on those activities which they have traditionally carried out and forget about writing. Philaminte tries to counteract her husband's statement:

La beauté du visage est un frêle ornement,
 Une fleur passagère, un éclat d'un moment,
 Et qui n'est attaché qu'à la simple épiderme;
 Mais celle de l'esprit est inhérente et ferme.
 J'ai donc cherché longtemps un biais de vous donner
 La beauté que les ans ne peuvent moissonner,
 De faire entrer chez vous le désir des sciences¹⁵ (Molière 1971: 1040).¹⁶

Apart from their keenness on knowledge, Bélise and Philaminte would like Henriette to marry Trissotin. On the one hand, Bélise is in love with the man who Henriette would like to marry, Clitandre. She even tries to dissuade Clitandre from marrying Henriette: "Je dirai qu'Henriette à l'hymen est rebelle, / Et que sans rien prétendre il faut brûler pour elle"¹⁷ (Molière 1971: 996). On the other hand, Philaminte wants Chrysale to make his daughter Henriette marry Trissotin:

Ce Monsieur Trissotin dont on nous fait un crime,
 Et qui n'a pas l'honneur d'être dans votre estime,
 Est celui que je prends pour l'époux qu'il lui faut,
 Et je sais mieux que vous juger de ce qu'il vaut:
 La contestation est ici superflue,
 Et de tout point chez moi l'affaire est résolue,
 Au moins ne dites mot du choix de cet époux¹⁸ (Molière 1971: 1014).

In the same way as in *Le Malade imaginaire*, the female characters do not help a fellow woman to achieve her goals. Apart from through the characterization of female characters, the influence of patriarchy is also perceived through the different characters' attitudes.

Although Lady Knowell is based on Bélise and Philaminte, there are also some interesting differences between the prototypes and Behn's character. Lady Knowell is also keen on knowledge and shows a particular interest in Leander, Sir Patient's nephew and the man whose own daughter, Lucretia, loves. Lady Knowell openly condemns the way

¹⁵ *The beauty of the face is a fragile ornament, / A passing flower, a moment's brightness / Which only belongs to the epidermis; / Whereas that of the mind is lasting and solid. / I have therefore been feeling about for the means of giving you / The beauty which time cannot remove / Of creating in you the love of knowledge.*

¹⁶ This statement from Molière's *Les Femmes savantes* helps us to prove the influence Molière exerted over Behn. In fact, in the prologue to Behn's first play, *The Forc'd Marriage* (1671), it is possible to find a similar statement used by the author in order to legitimate women's writing: "Beauty alone goes now at too cheap rates, / [...] They'll joyn the Force of Wit to Beauty now" (Behn 1996a: 7).

¹⁷ *Let me tell you that Henriette rebels against matrimony, and that you must love her without any hope of having your love returned.*

¹⁸ *It is what I have been thinking about, / And I wish to speak to you of what I intend to do. / This Mr. Trissotin on whose account we are blamed, / And who has not the honour of being esteemed by you; / Is the man whom I have chosen to be her husband; / And I can judge of his merit better than you can. / All discussion is superfluous here, / For I have duly resolved that it should be so.*

in which other women behave: "Oh how I hate the impertinence of women, who for the generality have no other knowledge than that of dressing, I am uneasy with the unthinking creatures" (Behn 1996b: 11). She spends her time reading literary works written in Greek or Latin as she considers other entertainment choices frivolous. On the contrary, her daughter, who thinks that Lady Knowell is in love with Leander, strives to uncover what she believes her mother's goal: "Indeed 'tis much better to be Entertaining a young Lover alone" (Behn 1996b: 11). However, Lady Knowell intends something slightly different: as Sir Patient would allow Isabella to marry Lodwick only if Lady Knowell married Leander, she pretends to be Leander's wife-to-be. Nonetheless, once Sir Patient realizes that Lady Knowell refuses to marry Leander in order to please her daughter Lucretia, he decides to avoid the marriage between Isabella and Lodwick. When Sir Patient informs Lady Knowell about his decision, she faces up to him:

[M]y son, thou contumelious Knight, who let me tell thee, shall marry thy Daughter *invito te*, that is, (to inform thy obtuse understanding) in spite of thee, yes shall marry her, though she inherits nothing but thy dull Enthusiasmes, which had she been legitimate she had been possess with (Behn 1996b: 27).

Suggesting that Sir Patient's daughter might not be legitimate, Lady Knowell is making use of what Foyster qualifies as "the worst insult which could be directed against a man" (1999: 7), which is being called a cuckold. As this scholar points out, in the popular mind there was a link between a husband's sexual ability and his wife's actions and, therefore, cuckolds are considered men who fail to give their wives sexual pleasure (1999: 67). Through her statement, Lady Knowell ridicules Sir Patient because a man's role as head of the household was regarded as an indicator of his ability to govern in the public world outside (cf. Foyster 1999: 4).

Although, since the beginning of the comedy, Lady Knowell is trying to help her son and daughter to achieve their goals, they ignore their mother's real purposes and therefore they try to make her change her mind. Lucretia encourages Leander to dissuade Lady Knowell to marry her: "[V]ow you were an Ass, not to be sensible of her perfections all this while, what a Coxcombe, to doat upon the Daughter when such charms were so visible in the Mother? Faith she'll believe all this" (Behn 1996b: 33). Yet, although neither her daughter nor her son notices their mother's generosity, Lady Knowell contrives to make Lucretia marry Leander. Lady Knowell herself offers to marry Leander and Sir Patient gets so happy that resolves to "give him immediately my Writings of all my Land in *Berkshire*, Five hundred Pounds a year Madam, and I wou'd have you Married this morning with my Daughter, so one Dinner and one Rejoycing will serve both" (Behn 1996b: 64). Behind Sir Patient's approval, there is a mercenary intention. However, Lady Knowell designs Leander for her daughter Lucretia. Throughout the whole comedy, Behn shows that intelligence, generosity and goodness are compatible features in women. Apart from being a learned lady, Lady Knowell is also a generous woman who takes into account her daughter's desires. Transferring Leander to her daughter, Lady Knowell not only turns him into a commodity but also laughs at Sir Patient. By reifying Leander, Lady Knowell places him at the same level as women, who in seventeenth-century society were commodified since their value depended on the dowry

their father could provide. At the same time, Lady Knowell promises Sir Patient to marry Leander but she allows her daughter to marry him. By helping her daughter, Lady Knowell establishes an alliance between women, which patriarchy has always tried to prevent, as it is possible to check in the comedy by Molière where women never support one another in order to achieve their goals. However, this is not the only difference between Molière's and Behn's comedies. It is also important to take into account the authors' attitudes towards Bélise and Lady Knowell: Molière's intention is to mock Bélise but, according to Hayden (2006: 330), the introduction of Lady Knowell helps Behn "to demonstrate that it was not Heaven in fact who had debarred womankind from anything." Moreover, as in the plot adapted from *Le Malade imaginaire*, in this subplot Behn challenges gender hierarchy when she turns men into the butts of the laughter-raising situations.

3. "[T]HINGS HAVE GON VERY CROSS WITH ME THIS TWO DAIES": FEMININE PASSIVITY AS AN ANTITHESIS TO THE CREATION OF WOMEN'S HUMOUR

Behn also resorted to Molière's *L'Amour médecin* in order to write her *Sir Patient Fancy*. In this comedy by the French dramatist, Clitandre dresses up as a doctor in order to make Sganarelle believe that his daughter Lucinde is also ill. Considering him an excellent doctor, Sganarelle relies on his analysis: his daughter is ill because she wants to marry. Then, Clitandre himself offers to marry Lucinde and Sganarelle acquiesces immediately: "[V]oilà Monsieur qui a envie de t'épouser, et je lui ai dit que je le voulais bien"¹⁹ (Molière 1971: 117). In *Sir Patient Fancy*, it is possible to find a similar situation: Lodwick, the man who loves Sir Patient's daughter, dresses up as a doctor, although he makes Sir Patient believe that, due to a very malignant influence, he should stay at home for two days. His recovery prevents him from witnessing his daughter's and nephew's weddings. Nevertheless, as Lodwick would like to marry Sir Patient's daughter and Leander is allowed to marry Lucretia, they force Sir Credulous to stay with Sir Patient in order to avoid his marriage to Lucretia. Besides, Sir Credulous makes Sir Patient believe that he is on the verge of dying: "Your ugly Face is an infallible sign, your *Dysurie* as the *Arabicks* call it, and your Ill-favor'd Countenance, are constant Relatives" (Behn 1996b: 69). The analysis which Sir Credulous carries out is completely arbitrary, but Sir Patient believes what this fake doctor says. Finally, this becomes the origin of Leander's contrivance to expose Lady Fancy's deception. After comparing these two scenes, it is possible to state that Behn also resorted to *L'Amour médecin* in order to write *Sir Patient Fancy*. Nevertheless, she turns Molière's simple scene into a much more complex scene in her comedy. Molière uses the scene in order to arrange the marriage between Clitandre and Lucinde. As usual in comedies written by Molière, the man decides what to do and carries it on, whereas the female character plays a passive role by deferring to the man's resolution. By contrast, it is necessary to highlight the complexity of Behn's scene. On the one hand, this scene allows Sir Patient not to witness Isabella's and Leander's weddings and, therefore, his house becomes a marginal location, a place far away from where the main action is taking place so that he cannot exert any influence on the course of events. As a counterpart to Sganarelle, a female character such

¹⁹ *This Gentleman would like to marry you, and I told him that I was willing.*

as Lady Knowell directs the course of events in *Sir Patient Fancy*. On the other hand, this scene links two of the sources which Behn resorted to, *L'Amour médecin* and *Le Malade imaginaire*. Moreover, this scene is the origin of the challenging of Sir Patient's authority, which in this comedy stands for patriarchy.

There are two other characters in *Sir Patient Fancy*, Sir Credulous and Curry, who do not seem to be originally created by Behn. According to Halliwell (1860: 230), Behn resorted to Molière again, specifically to *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*. However, Langbaine (1691: 18-21) states that she took those characters from Brome's *The Damselle*. In Behn's comedy, one of the most interesting features of Sir Credulous is the way he treats his mare. Since the beginning of the comedy, he personifies this animal by making reference to her as "my Poor Gillian" (Behn 1996b: 12). He even loves this mare as if she were his sweetheart: "I shall think of her whilst I live, poor Fool, that I shall, though I had forty Mistresses" (Behn 1996b: 12). At the same time, though, he thinks that she has not provided him with the economic benefits he deserves:

Why was it Civilly done of her thinkest thou, to dye at Branford, when had she liv'd till to morrow, she had been converted into Mony and have been in my Pocket? for now I am to Marry and live in town, I'll sell off all my Pads; poor Fool, I think she e'ne died for grief I wou'd have sold her (Behn 1996b: 12).

He equates the relationship between him and his mare with marriage. Nevertheless, this animal dies before he expects and, therefore, Sir Credulous is not able to obtain any money from her. As a consequence, he is forced to marry in order to get the economic benefits he wished for. Moreover, it is worth noticing that he does not seem to be very interested in any woman or, at least, as much as he is concerned about his mare. The introduction of this character may be due to Behn's interest in denouncing the position of women in seventeenth-century society. It contributes to her recurrent presentation of female characters who are commodified and dehumanised by their suitors, husbands or fathers, who only wish to obtain financial profits from them.

In Brome's *The Damselle*, Amphilus's mare dies in similar circumstances as Sir Credulous's: "Was it well done of her, dost thinke, to die to day upon the way, when she had been i' my purse to morrow in Smithfield: Poor fool, I think she dyed for grief I would ha'sold her" (Brome 1653: unnumbered page). Nevertheless, in spite of the similarities between Amphilus's and Sir Credulous's words, the former is only interested in the money he would have earned if he had sold her before its death: "[S]he had not dyed mine own, 'twould nere have griev'd me" (Brome 1653: unnumbered page). He never gives her a name, he does not identify her with any woman and he does not mention either her daughter or her shoes. Regarding the influence of Molière's *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* on Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy*, it is worth highlighting that, like Sir Credulous, Monsieur de Pourceaugnac does not like the town and his aunt has just died. In this comedy, one of the character's female relatives dies and, therefore, it is possible that Behn could have taken the idea of personifying the mare from Molière's comedy. In fact, Brome's and Molière's characters share some features: both hate the town and have lost a beloved recently. Blending both characters' features, Behn manages to create Sir Credulous, a man who has lost an animal

which he treats like a human being. By chance, Amphilus had lost a mare and Monsieur de Pourceaugnac an aunt and, therefore, this coincidence allows to reinforce the identification Behn includes in her own comedy.

CONCLUSION

After the analysis we have carried out, we can assert that Behn not only resorted to *Le Malade imaginaire* but also to Molière’s plays *Les Femmes savantes*, *L’Amour médecin*, *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* and Brome’s *The Damoiselle* in order to write her *Sir Patient Fancy*. The number of plays she resorted to in order to write her *Sir Patient Fancy* proves that she was a professional playwright: not only was she interested in the plays which were popular in the continent but she also made use of the most appealing characters (Béline, Bélise and Philaminte, Clitandre, Sir Credulous) in the above mentioned plays so as to pen her own work. Moreover, I can contend that, regarding Behn’s comedy, gender makes a difference in the production of humour. Although Behn took the main characters of her comedy from plays originally written by men, her humour is characterized by those features of the so-called women’s humour which Barreca, Finney or Walker have pointed out. Through her comedies, Behn spells trouble to those in power because she usually challenges patriarchal institutions, and she does that by altering the characterization of women. Behn’s female characters are always active and they usually establish a bond between them, which allow them to join their forces against the oppressing patriarchal institutions. Besides, we must also remark that, although she borrows a considerable number of elements from other comedies, she outstandingly improves them, which leads us to conclude that, as she suggests in the letter preceding the comedy, her work has been undervalued simply because of her gender identity. She was not right in her claim of just having got “a bare hint” from *Le Malade imaginaire*, but the mere profusion of sources and the significant alterations which she made neutralize the accusations of plagiarism and make the play interesting and worthy of critical scrutiny. Apart from merging elements from different sources, *Sir Patient Fancy* exposes women’s main concerns in seventeenth-century society.

REFERENCES

- ATTARDO, S. 2002. “Semiotics and Pragmatics of Humor Communication”. *Babel A.F.I.A.L.* Número extraordinario: 25-66.
- BARRECA, Regina. 1988. “Introduction”. *Last Laughs. Perspectives on Women and Comedy*. Ed. R. Barreca. Philadelphia: Gordon & Breach. 3-22.
- . 1992. “Making Trouble: An Introduction.” *New Perspectives on Women and Comedy*. Ed. R. Barreca. Philadelphia: Gordon & Breach. 1-11.
- . 1994. ““Untamed and Unabashed”: Towards a Theory of Women and Humor in Literature.” *Untamed and Unabashed. Essays on Women and Humor in British Literature*. Ed. R. Barreca. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 11-33.

- . 1996. "Introduction." *The Penguin Book of Women's Humor*. Ed. R. Barreca. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1-10.
- BEHN, Aphra. 1996a. "The Forc'd Marriage, Or The Jealous Bridegroom. A Tragi-Comedy". (1671). *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 5. Ed. J. Todd. London. William Pickering. 1-81.
- . 1996b. "Sir Patient Fancy: A Comedy" (1678). *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 6. Ed. J. Todd. London: Pickering & Chatto.
- BERGSON, Henri. 2009. "From *Laughter* (1900)". *A Source Book of Literary and Philosophical Writings About Humour and Laughter*. Eds. J. Figueroa-Dorrego & C. Larkin-Galiñanes. Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press. 575-623.
- BROME, Richard. 1653. *The Damselle*. London: Richard Marriot & Thomas Dring.
- CRAWFORD, Mary. 1992. "Just Kidding: Gender and Conversational Humor." *New Perspectives on Women and Comedy*. Ed. R. Barreca. Philadelphia: Gordon & Breach. 23-37.
- FIGUEROA DORREGO, Jorge. 2001. "'I have my Tools about me Sweet-heart': El humor como herramienta para la (de)construcción de género en las *Love-Letters* de Aphra Behn." *Estudios sobre humor literario*. Eds. J. Figueroa Dorrego et al. Vigo, Universidade de Vigo, Servizo de Publicacións. 81-88.
- . 2005. "Disputing Patriarchy, Disrupting Romance: Humour in Behn's *The Lucky Mistake* and 'The Wandering Beauty'." *Aphra Behn: Transgression, Tradition, Innovation*. Eds. Mary Ann O'Donnell & Bernard Dhuicq. Paris: Bilingua GA Editions. 106-116.
- FINKE, Laurie. 1993. "Aphra Behn and the Ideological Construction of Restoration Literary Theory." *Rereading Aphra Behn. History, Theory, and Criticism*. Ed. Heidi Hutner. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia. 17-43.
- FINNEY, Gail. 1994. "Unity in Difference?: An Introduction." *Look Who's Laughing. Gender and Comedy*. Ed. G. Finney. Amsterdam, Gordon & Breach.
- FOYSTER, Elizabeth A. 1999. *Manhood in Early Modern England. Honour, Sex and Marriage*. London, Longman.
- HALLIWELL, James O. 1860. *A Dictionary of Old English Plays*. London: John Russell Smith.
- HAYDEN, Judy. 2006. "Of Privileges and Masculine Parts: The Learned Lady in Aphra Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy*." *Papers on Language and Literature* 42/3: 317-331.
- HUGHES, Derek. 2001. *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- JACOB, Giles. 1719. *The Poetical Register: or, the Lives and Characters of the English Dramatick Poets*. London: E. Curli.

- LANGBAINE, Gerard. 1688. *Momus Triumphans: or, the Plagiaries of the English Stage*. London, N.C.
- . 1691. *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets*. Oxford: G. West & H. Clements.
- MOLIÈRE. 1971. *Oeuvres complètes*. Paris: Gallimard.
- SHORT, Kayann. 1992. "Sylvia Talks Back." *New Perspectives on Women and Comedy*. Ed. R. Barreca. Philadelphia: Gordon & Breach. 57-63.
- STEPHEN, Leslie. 2009. "'Feminine Humour' (1871)". *A Source Book of Literary and Philosophical Writings About Humour and Laughter*. Eds. J. Figueroa-Dorrego & C. Larkin-Galiñanes. Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press. 533-538.
- TODD, Janet. 1996a. *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*. London: André Deutsch.
- TODD, Janet, ed. 1996b. *The Works of Aphra Behn*. Vol. 6. London, Pickering & Chatto.
- WALKER, Nancy A. 1988. *A Very Serious Thing. Women's Humor and American Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.